



ABSOLUTION IN BLOOD

STARMAN

41 | APR 98

ROBINSON
ERSKINE



7/98

CRAY PRISON.
SOUTH OF OPAL.
SOUTH OF OLD
TOWN ALLEYS.

NICER THAN MOST.
CLEANER. ONE RIOT IN '54.
ONLY SEVEN ESCAPEES IN
ITS WHOLE HISTORY.

THE PRISONERS KNOW A
GOOD THING. THEY TOE
THE LINE. MOST OF
THEM. THERE WAS THE
MIST (THE ELDER) AND
HIS DAUGHTER MIST
(THE YOUNGER). AND
THERE WAS RAGDOLL.
THESE THREE CAUSED
SOME STRIFE. A FEW
GUARDS DIED.

AND THERE WAS ONE
OTHER. A BAD, BAD MAN.
KILLER WASP. HIS CAPTURE
BY WILDCAT MADE THE
NEWS...HIS EXPLOSIVE
ESCAPE AND BLOODY
RECAPTURE DID, TOO.

BUT HIS ATTACKS ON GUARDS
AND FELLOW INMATES...KILLINGS
AND DISFIGUREMENTS--THE
PRISON GOVERNOR WAS KEEN THAT
THOSE TERRIBLE ACTIONS BY
THE WASP REMAIN UNDISCLOSED
TO THE PUBLIC... THAT THE
PEOPLE OF OPAL FELT SAFE.
(AND HE WAS SEVEN YEARS FROM
RETIRING AND DIDN'T NEED THE
BAD PUBLICITY.)

SO HE HAD A SMALL, SPECIAL WING
BUILT. AND ALTHOUGH THE WASP IS
OLD NOW, THE PLACE STILL CARRIES
THE NAME THE GUARDS CHRISTENED
IT BACK THEN.

"THE WASP NEST" WHERE
OPAL'S MOST DANGEROUS
CRIMINALS CALL HOME.

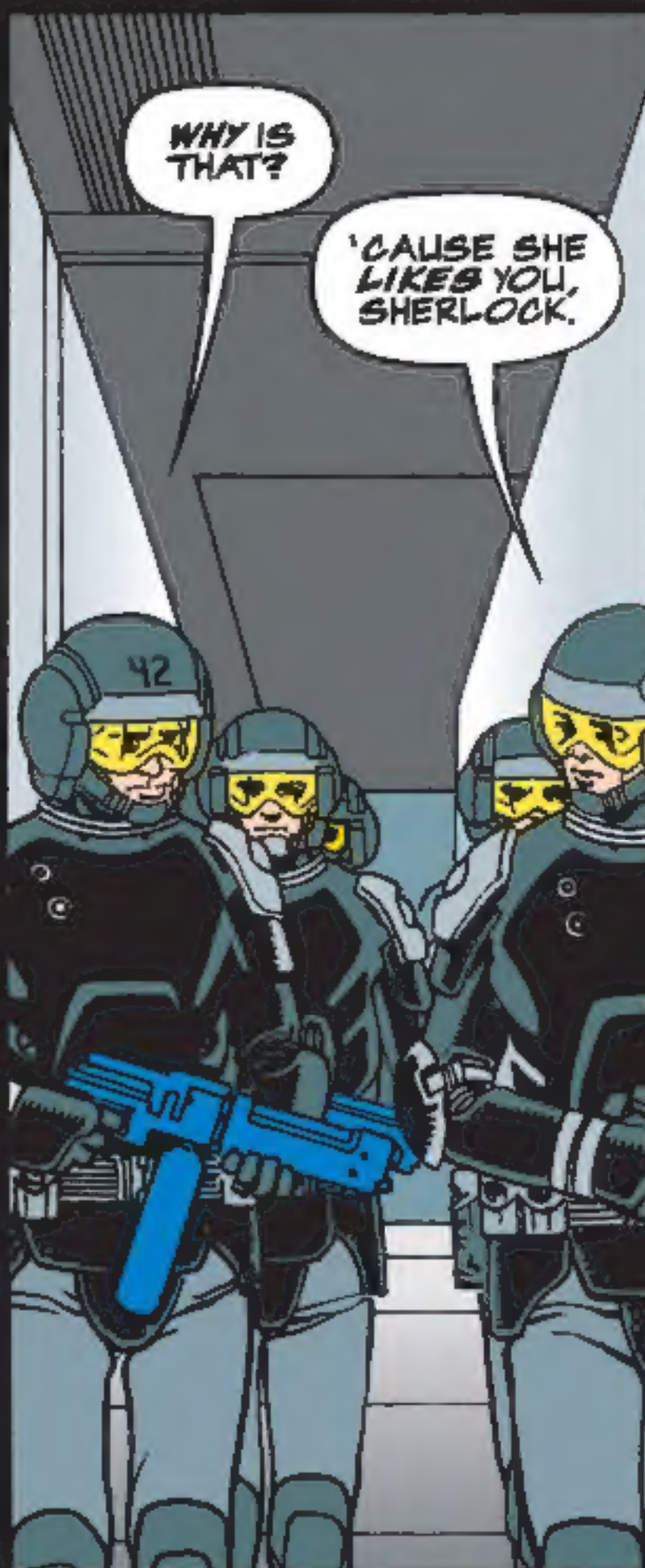
GOD,
I HATE
GETTING
INTO
THESE.

WELL, AS
LONG AS HE'S
A PRISONER
HERE, WE
HAVEN'T GOT
A LOT OF
CHOICE.

WHAT DID
THE REPORT
SAY?

HE'S CHOKING. HE
LOST CONSCIOUS-
NESS. I DUNNO. I
GUESS WE'LL FIND
OUT WHEN WE GET
INSIDE HIS
CELL.

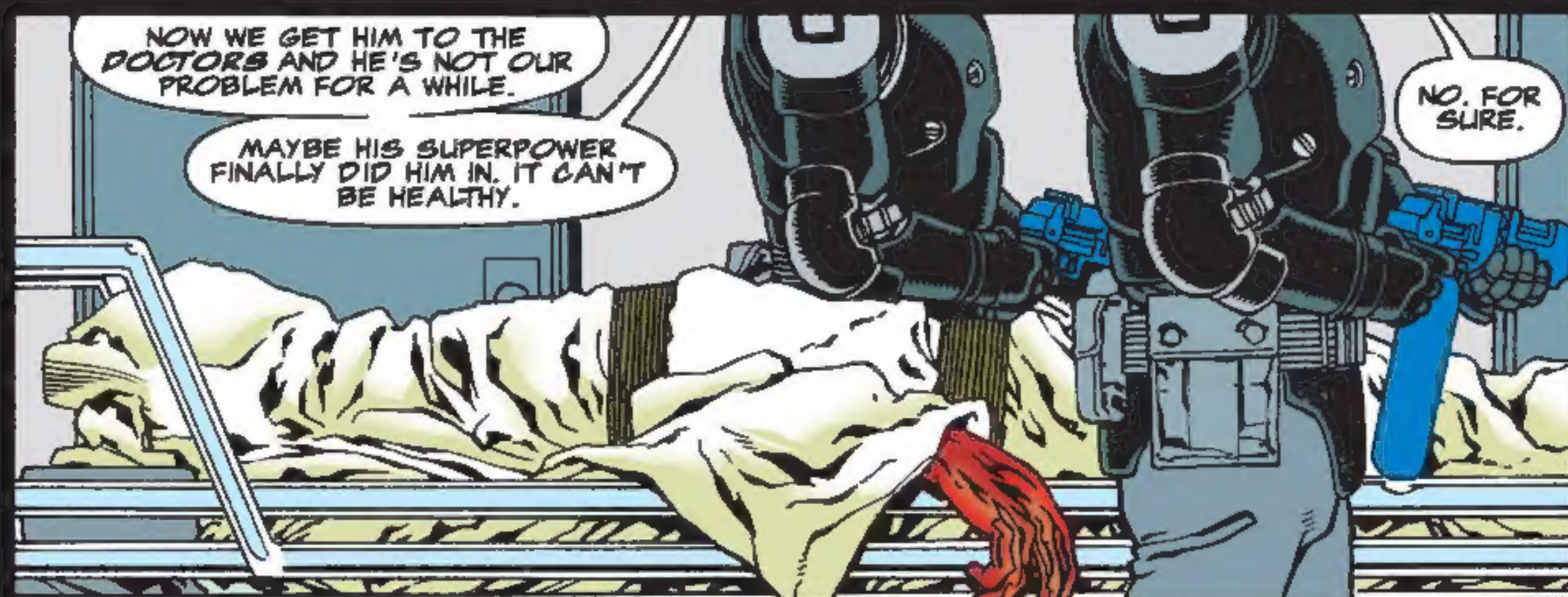






WELL, THAT
TOOK LESS
TIME THAN I
THOUGHT IT
WOULD.

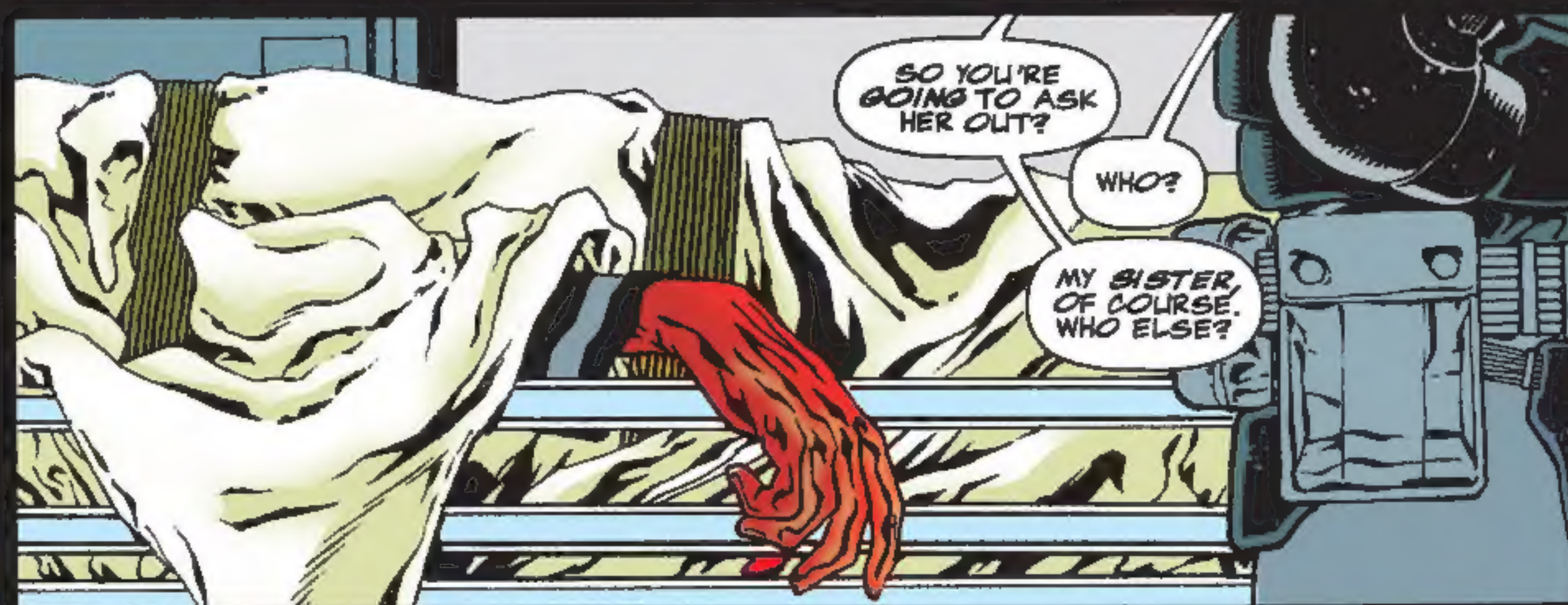
IT'S ALWAYS
EASIER WHEN
THEY DON'T
STRUGGLE.



NOW WE GET HIM TO THE
DOCTORS AND HE'S NOT OUR
PROBLEM FOR A WHILE.

MAYBE HIS SUPERPOWER
FINALLY DID HIM IN. IT CAN'T
BE HEALTHY.

NO, FOR
SURE.



SO YOU'RE
GOING TO ASK
HER OUT?

WHO?

MY SISTER,
OF COURSE.
WHO ELSE?



OH, JUNE. YEAH. AND
BOY, AM I DELIGHTED
YOU DON'T MIND.

JUST
TREAT HER
RIGHT.

MY
WORD OF
HONOR.

VILLAIN'S REDEMPTION



...ALARMING
FOOTAGE OF DR.
PHOSPHORUS'
ESCAPE FROM THE
HIGH-SECURITY ANNEX
OF CLAY PRISON.

SEVENTEEN GUARDS
WERE KILLED IN THE
BREAKOUT. MANY DYING
HOURS AFTERWARDS FROM
A SEVERE AND ADVANCED
FORM OF RADIATION
POISONING.

THE CAMERA TEAM
WHO GOT THIS
FOOTAGE ARE ALSO
NOW SEVERELY--

writer • JAMES ROBINSON
artist • GARY ERSKINE
colorist • GREGORY WRIGHT
letterer • BILL OAKLEY
assistant editor • CHUCK KIM
editor • ARCHIE GOODWIN

JACK KNIGHT
created by
JAMES ROBINSON
& TONY HARRIS



I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT. PHOSPHORUS AND I FOUGHT. HE BURNED MY ARM. THAT'S CERTAINLY AS MUCH CONTACT AS THESE GUARDS GOT.

AND I AM FINE. I'M NOT ILL FROM RADIATION.

I CAN'T EXPLAIN IT, DAD. IT'S A MYSTERY.

WELL, I'LL BE WORKING ON DEFENSES FOR YOU, SON. IT'S OBVIOUS YOU'LL HAVE TO FACE HIM AT SOME POINT IF HE'S EVER GOING TO BE RECAPTURED.

I LIKE TO HOPE THE COPS CAN TAKE CARE OF THIS ONE. GETTING SICK FROM RADIATION IS SO FAR DOWN MY LIST OF THINGS I WANT TO HAPPEN TO ME.

YOU'RE AFRAID?

I'LL FIGHT PHOSPHORUS IF I HAVE TO, BUT I'M WARRY, SURE.

SMART BOY. BRAVE BUT CAREFUL. YOU NEED TO BE BOTH NOWADAYS.

AND LUCKY.

ANYWAY, WHY ARE YOU HERE? YOU HAVE THAT "ABOUT TO ASK ME FOR A FAVOR" LOOK.


SO?

I WANT TO GO INTO SPACE, DAD. I NEED A ROCKET.

I DIDN'T REALIZE I DID, BUT YEAH, I WON'T DENY IT.

ANY IDEAS?

END OF PROLOGUE...



...NOW
REACH
FOR YOUR
GUNS...

...AS SCALPHUNTER
WOULD HAVE SAID.

THOUGH
NEITHER OF
THESE MEN...

...OF
COURSE...


...ARE SCALP-
HUNTER...

...BRIAN SAVAGE, THE
WESTERN LAWMAN WHO WAS
SHERIFF OF OPAL AS THE
YEAR 1899 GREW OLD AND
DIED, IS LONG DEAD, TOO.

BUT THIS DUET OF BLACK
AND BULLET DOES SHARE
A CONNECTION WITH
SAVAGE OF YORE.



ONE AN IMMORTAL, WAS
ALIVE THEN. HE WAS THE
SHERIFF'S FRIEND.



AND THE OTHER WAS
BRIAN SAVAGE IN A
PREVIOUS INCARNATION.

HE HAS BEEN
REBORN.

A
REPENTANT
SINNER.



AND THE
MEN WHO
DIE?

THESE ARE BAD
MEN? THEY ARE NO
BETTER THAN THEIR
FATES. VILE MEN.
THEY DESERVE
THEIR DEATHS.

OR SO MATT O'DARE
SAYS TO HIMSELF...
OVER AND OVER...
JUSTIFICATION FOR
EACH SHOT FIRED.

THE SHADE, ON
THE OTHER
HAND, HUMS A
MELODY UNDER
HIS BREATH
AND JUSTIFIES
HIS ACTIONS
NOT AT ALL.

FOR SUCH
DOUBTS
REQUIRE
CONSCIENCE...
AND THE MAN
IN BLACK HAS
NONE.

WELL,
THAT LOOKS
LIKE IT.

RECORD
TIME, TOO.
YOU'RE
GETTING
BETTER.





BETTER AT WHAT? KILLING IN COLD BLOOD? IT'S A TALENT I HOPE TO GET WORSE AT FOR WANT OF PRACTICE AS SOON AS I CAN.

COLD BLOOD? DID WE NOT GIVE THESE FOOLS AN OPTION? AN EASY OPTION AT THAT.

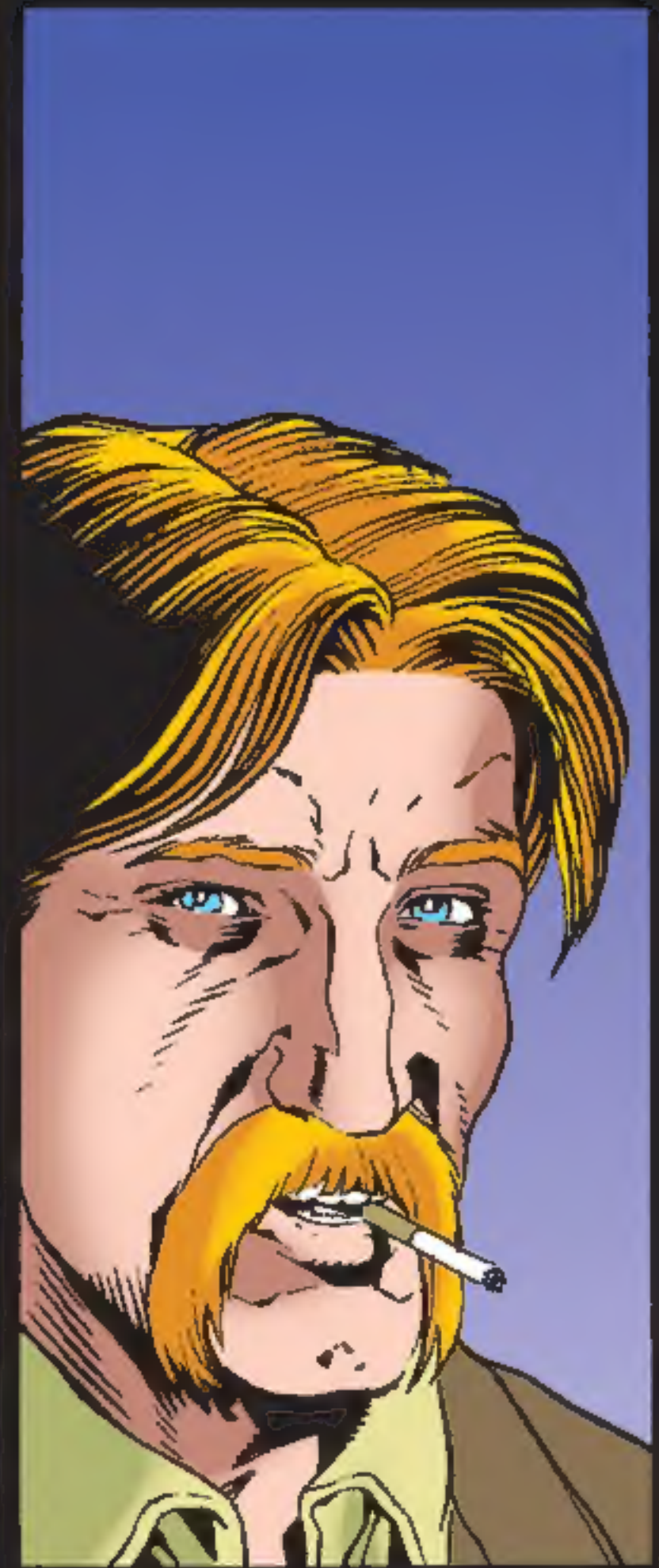


AND DID THEY NOT REFUSE? DID THEY NOT DRAW THEIR GUNS?

I GUESS.

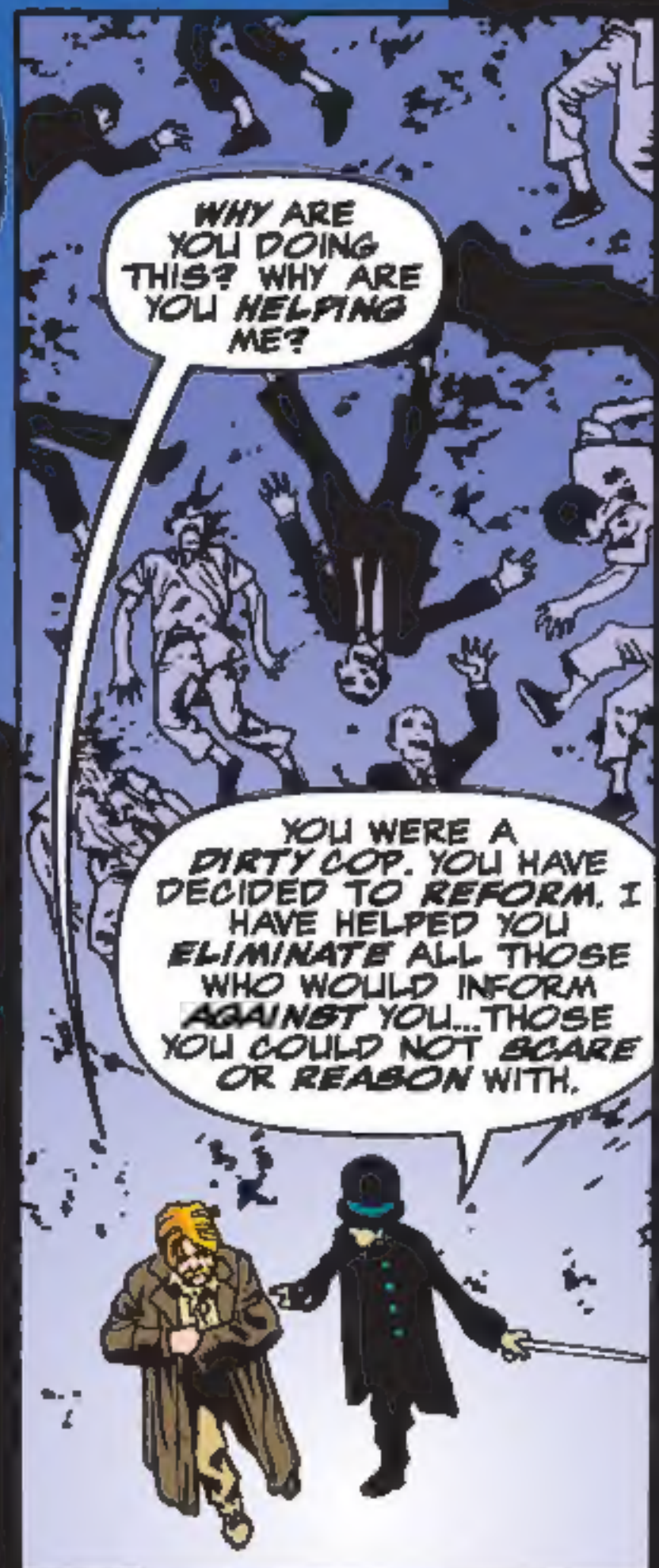
AND THEN THE FUN BEGAN.

IT WASN'T FUN.



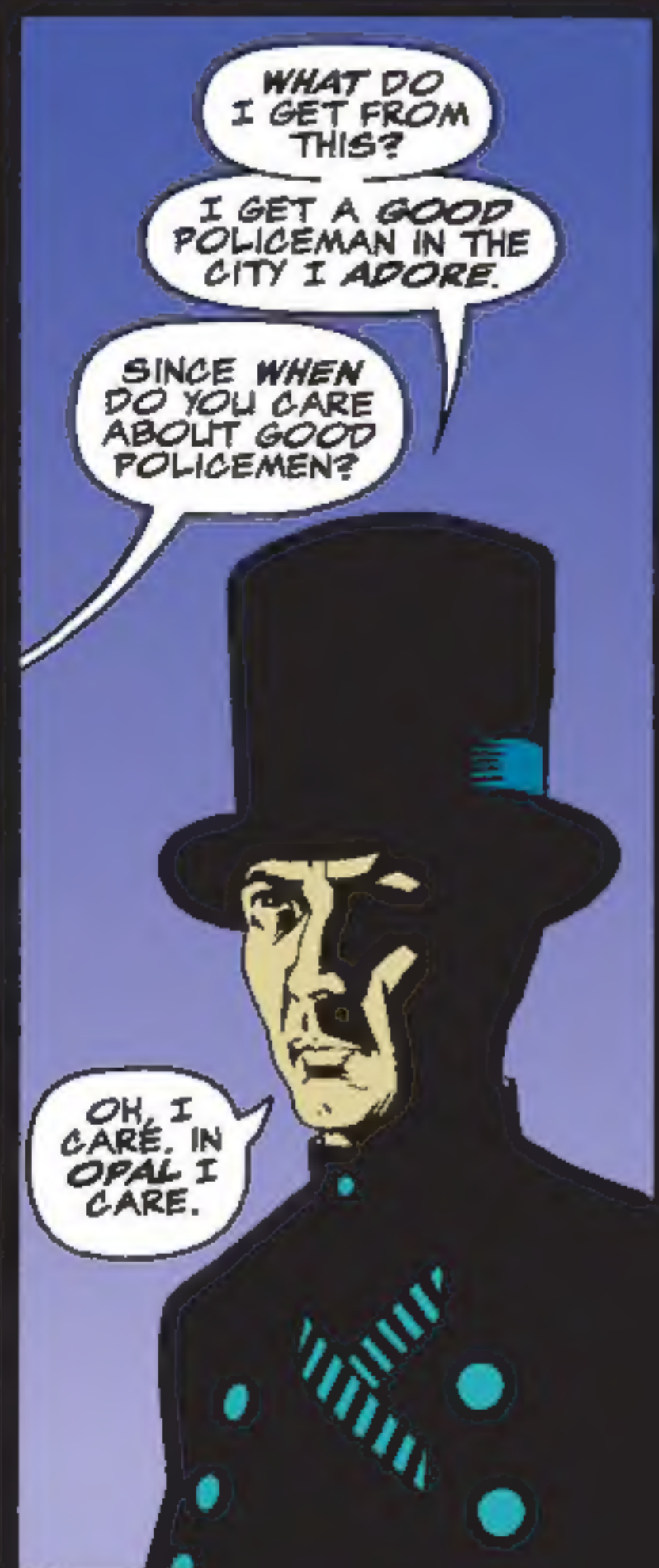
OKAY, IT WAS A LITTLE BIT FUN, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN I'M NOT GUILTY.

BELIEVE AN OLD DEBAUCHER LIKE ME, ONLY THE MOST EXQUISITE OF PLEASURES ARE CAPABLE OF INDUCING A GUILTY NEXT MORNING TASTE.



WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS? WHY ARE YOU HELPING ME?

YOU WERE A DIRTY COP. YOU HAVE DECIDED TO REFORM. I HAVE HELPED YOU ELIMINATE ALL THOSE WHO WOULD INFORM AGAINST YOU...THOSE YOU COULD NOT SCARE OR REASON WITH.



WHAT DO I GET FROM THIS?

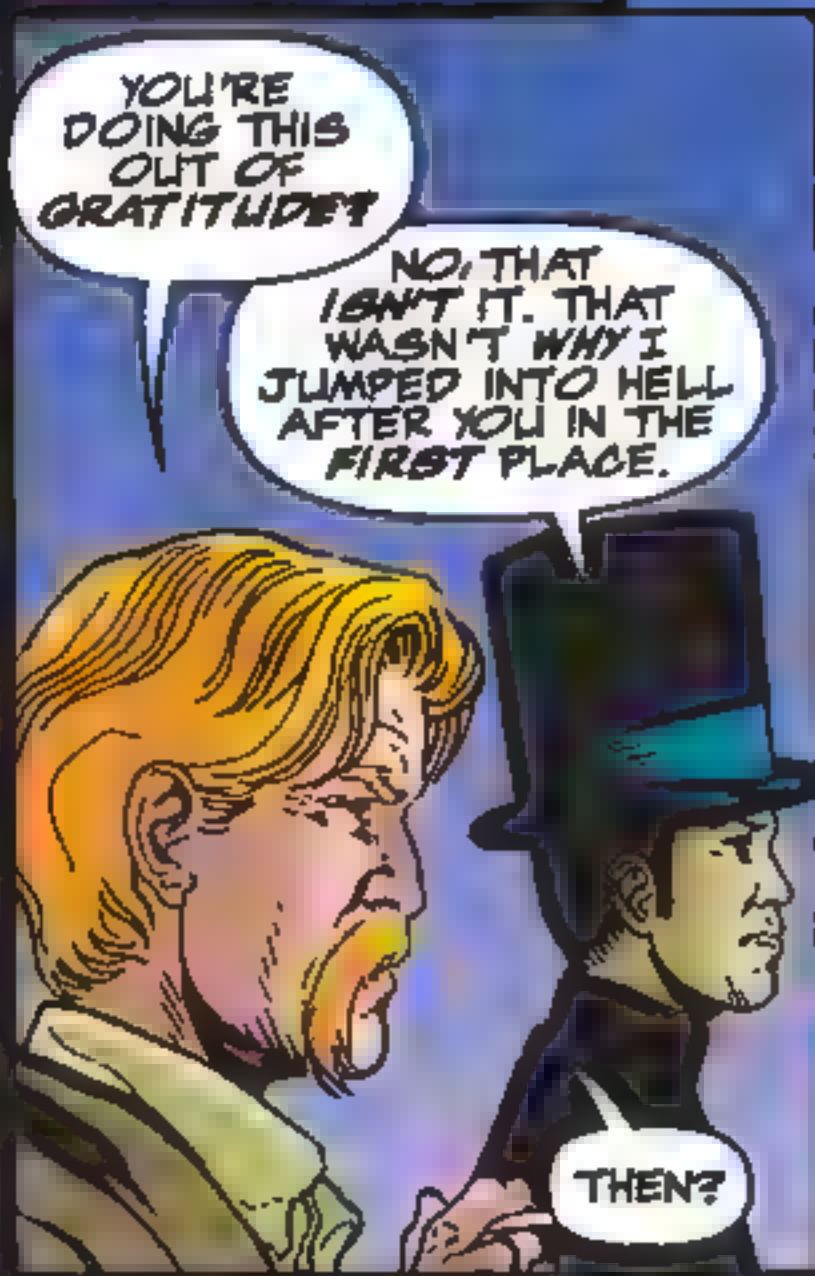
I GET A GOOD POLICEMAN IN THE CITY I ADORE.

SINCE WHEN DO YOU CARE ABOUT GOOD POLICEMEN?

OH, I CARE. IN OPAL I CARE.



AND WHEN YOU WERE IN HELL, WHEN YOU ESCAPED THE DEMON'S CLUTCHES, JACK TOLD ME HE HEARD YOU YELL THAT NOT ONLY WERE YOU GOING TO GET AWAY BUT YOU WERE GOING TO RESCUE ME AND TAKE ME WITH YOU.



YOU'RE DOING THIS OUT OF GRATITUDE?

NO, THAT ISN'T IT. THAT WASN'T WHY I JUMPED INTO HELL AFTER YOU IN THE FIRST PLACE.

THEN?



BRIAN SAVAGE WAS MY FRIEND.



BUT AM I SAVAGE? I DON'T REMEMBER ANY OF HIS TIME. I...AM I WORTHY OF HIM?

I LIVE IN HOPE.



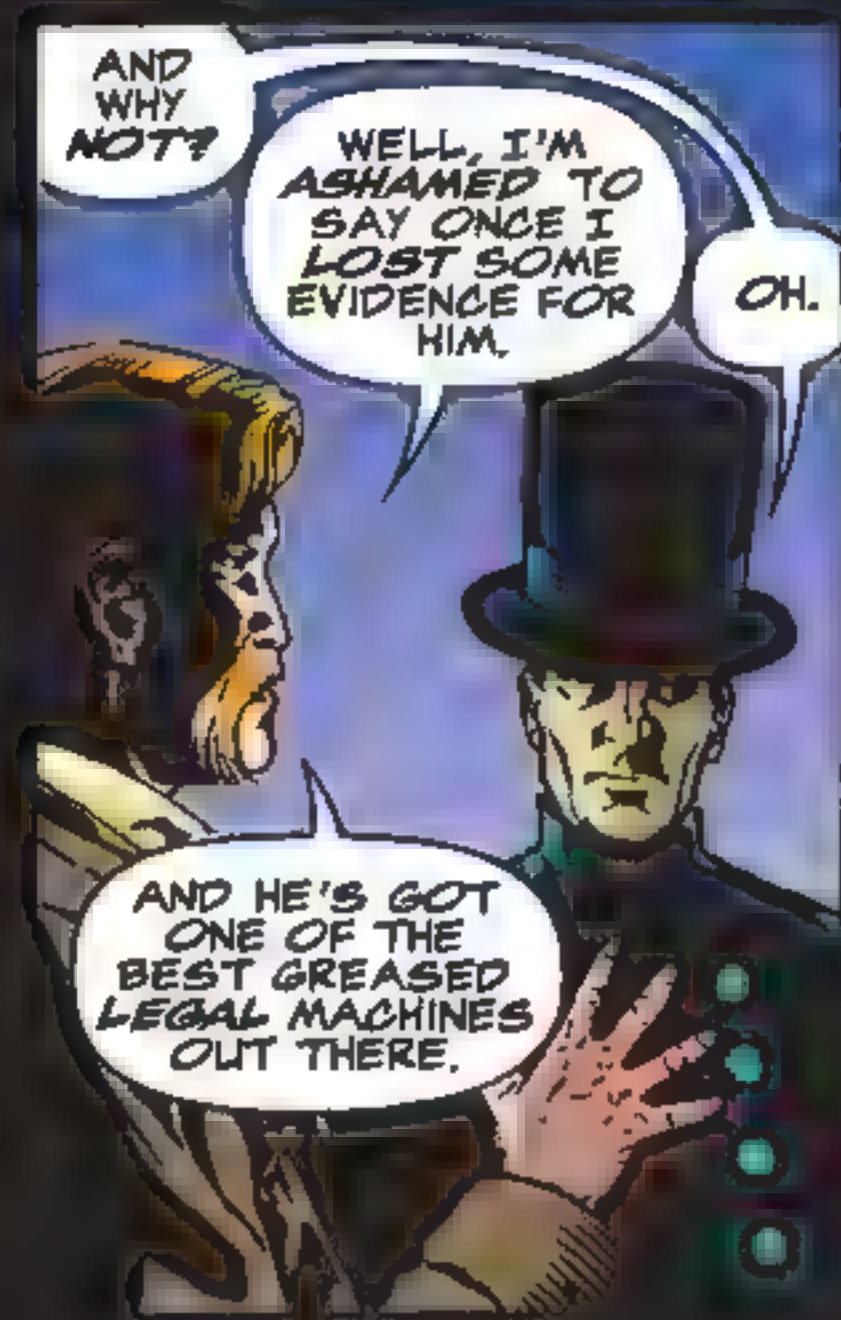
ANYWAY, HOW MANY MORE BEFORE WE'RE DONE?

LAST TWO NAMES ON THE LIST I MADE. ONE, AN INNOCENT WORKADAY GUY. HE GOT CAUGHT UP IN THE MOB LIKE ME.



AND THE OTHER?

MILO DRAPER. HE'S BAD NEWS. THE COPS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO CORRAL HIM FOR YEARS.

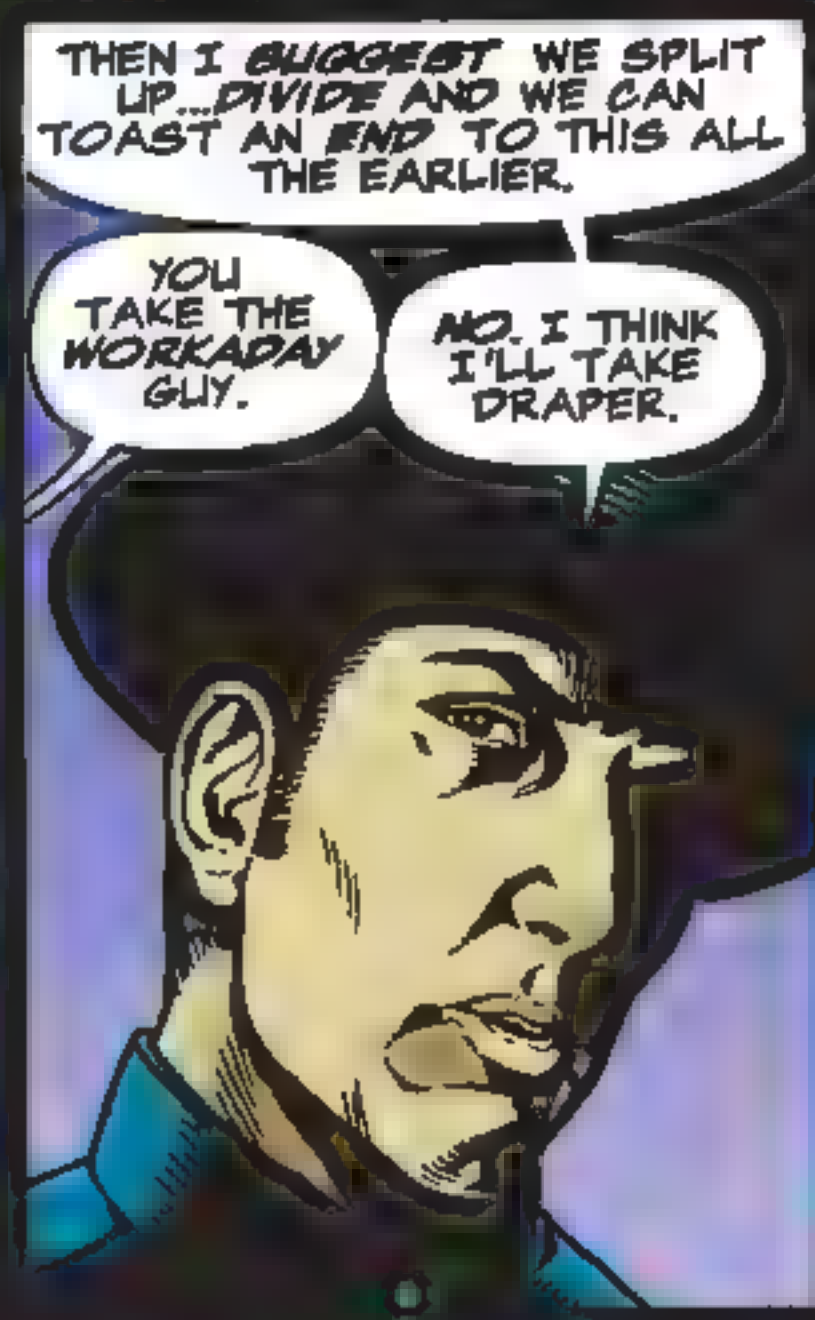


AND WHY NOT?

WELL, I'M ASHAMED TO SAY ONCE I LOST SOME EVIDENCE FOR HIM.

OH.

AND HE'S GOT ONE OF THE BEST GREASED LEGAL MACHINES OUT THERE.



THEN I SUGGEST WE SPLIT UP...DIVIDE AND WE CAN TOAST AN END TO THIS ALL THE EARLIER.

YOU TAKE THE WORKADAY GUY.

NO. I THINK I'LL TAKE DRAPER.



AND WE WILL MEET TO DEAL WITH THE ONE OTHER PERSON WHO COULD BRING YOU DOWN BY REVEALING YOUR PAST CORRUPTION. THE ONE NAME YOU LEFT OFF YOUR LIST.

U.M...YEAH. I GUESS.

CARL EARL SHIFTS IN HIS SEAT. HE CHANGES THE CHANNEL FROM A DUMB "NO-CORE" COP THING ON HBO TO THE NEWS.

"THERE'S A LOT OF BAD GOING ON," HE THINKS. "A LOT."

"I'M JUST GLAD ME AND MINE ARE ALL RIGHT."

HE REACHES FOR A CIGARETTE, THEN REALIZES HIS POCKET IS EMPTY. A PROMISE TO HIS WIFE. FOR THE BOY'S SAKE.

HIS WIFE FINISHES LOADING THE DISHES AND THEN SITS BY HIS SIDE. THEIR SON PLAYS IN HIS CRIB.

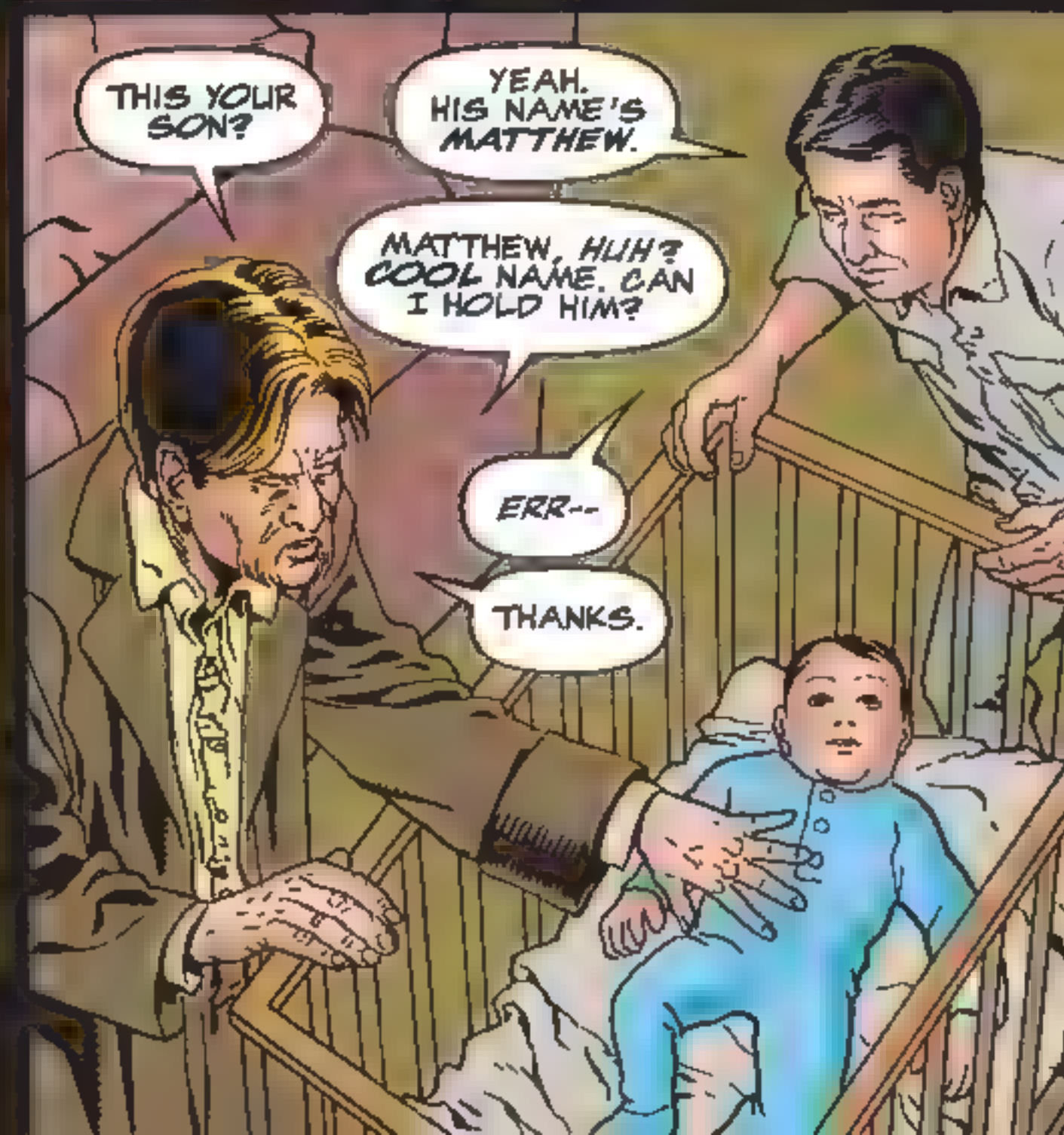
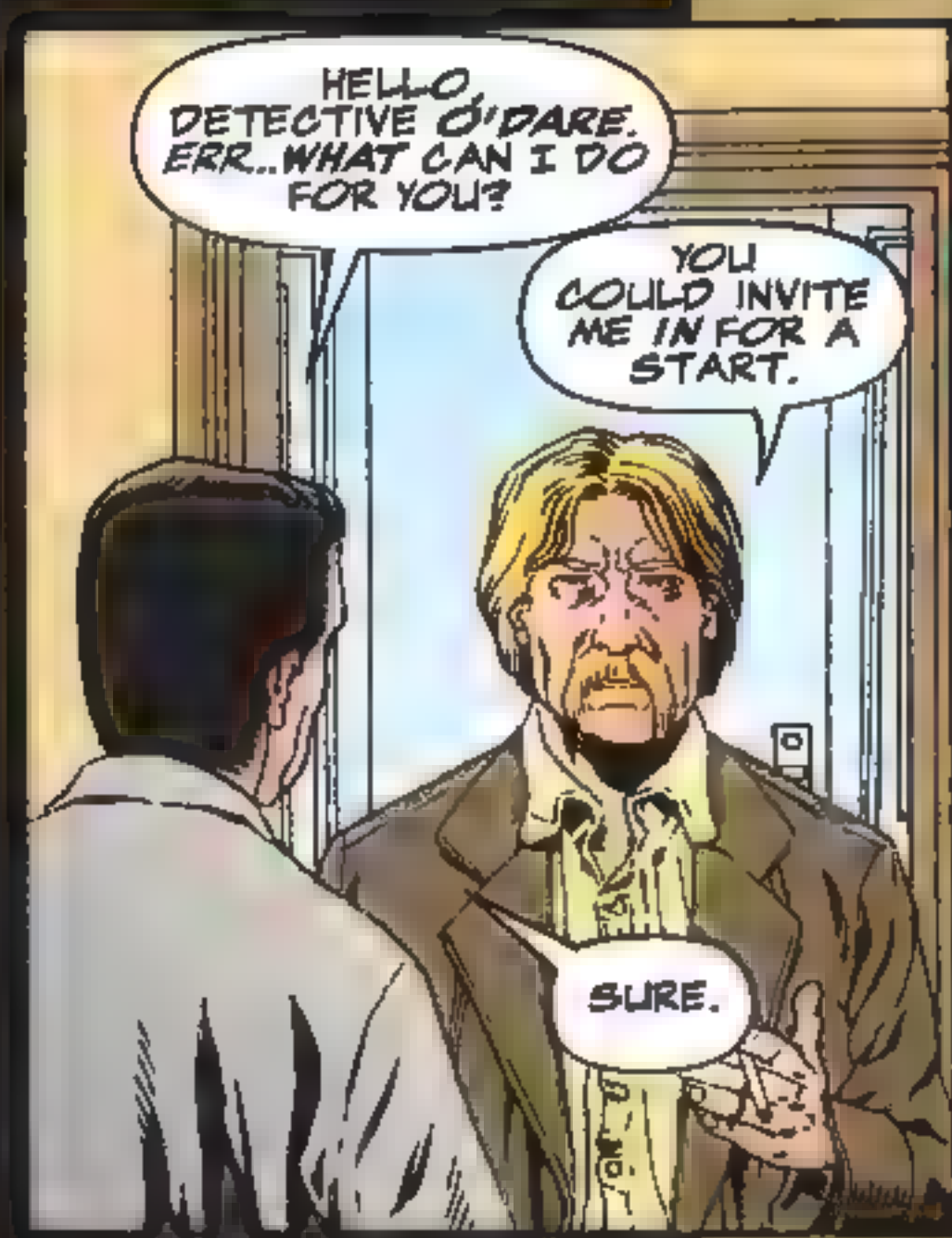
THE NEWSREADER LISTS THE DEAD FROM A MULTI-CAR FREEWAY HORROR. CARL TUNES OUT THE SADNESS AND HEARS HIS SON GURGLE AND SIGH AND SQUEAL. THE NOISES THAT EASE CARL'S HEART.

"LIFE IS GOOD" HE THINKS, AND BREATHES A SILENT PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO DIED THIS DAY.

HIS WIFE SMILES AT HIM. HE SMILES BACK.

AND THEN THERE'S A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

OH GOD.



I'M TRYING TO CHANGE, EARL. I'M TRYING TO REFORM. EVERYONE WHO COULD LINK ME TO MY PAST SINS, I'VE SPOKEN TO.

SOME WERE REASONABLE. OTHERS... THANKFULLY ALL OF THEM BAD GUYS LIKE ME... THEM THAT WEREN'T REASONABLE, I HAD TO DEAL WITH.

I KNOW, 'CAUSE I WAS THE ONE MADE YOU DO IT. YOU DIDN'T HAVE MUCH OF A CHOICE, THOUGH YOU WERE PAID A SWEET SUM FOR YOUR TIME TOO, AS I RECALL.

YOUR TRUCKING COMPANY MADE SOME DELIVERIES. TRANSPORTED SOME CARGO ACROSS STATE LINES FOR THE MOB.

ME, I DON'T SEE THAT AS A BAD, BAD THING. SURVIVAL. YOU'RE PUTTING FOOD ON THE TABLE. MILK FOR YOUR SON. A NICE PLACE FOR HIM TO GROW UP.

I CAN APPRECIATE THAT.

THING IS, CAN YOU APPRECIATE WHAT I'M DOING? I'M TRYING TO TURN AROUND. IF I CAN PULL THIS OFF, I'LL BE THE BEST COP THIS CITY'S GOT. I SWEAR IT. AND THAT MEANS A LOT TO ME. A LOT. ENOUGH THAT IF I HAVE TO HURT YOU TO KEEP YOU QUIET I WILL, BUT I DON'T WANT TO. IT'S YOUR CHOICE.

YOU REMEMBER MY BROTHER, DETECTIVE?

DID I HURT HIM?

NO, YOU DRAGGED HIM OUT OF A BAR FIGHT ONCE WHERE HE MIGHT HAVE GOTTEN HIMSELF KILLED.

YOU WANT MY SILENCE? YOU GOT IT. I'M TRYING TO KEEP CLEAN, TOO. MY BUSINESS, MY LIFE AT HOME. HELL, IF I CAN QUIT SMOKING, THEN ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE. EVEN WHAT YOU'RE ATTEMPTING.

YOU'RE A LUCKY MAN, EARL. YOU GOT A WONDERFUL FAMILY. I ENVY YOU.

HERE'S YOUR COFFEE, DETECTIVE.

MATT, THE NAME'S MATT. HERE'S YOUR SON, MRS. EARL. I'LL SWAP YOU.

THIS IS A GREAT CITY MATT, DON'T YOU THINK?

OH, YEAH...

"...MAY THE OPAL'S
LIGHT NEVER DIM."

OPAL ELECTRIC

I'LL BE HOME FOR THE NIGHT. YOU CAN GARAGE THE CAR.

YOU GUYS ESCORT ME UP THERE AND THEN THE BOYS WAITING IN THE PENTHOUSE CAN TAKE OVER.

YOU GOT IT, MR. DRAPER...

YOU CAN NEVER BE TOO CAREFUL.

ALL RIGHT, YOU GUYS HANG HERE FOR A WHILE. MAKE SURE NOTHING FOLLOWED US IN. AFTER THAT YOU CAN SPLIT.

NIGHT, BOSS.

NIGHT.

ME, I COULD USE A NAP SOON AS I--

OH GOD!

EDDIE! BADE!

GET IN HERE, THEY'VE ALL BEEN--

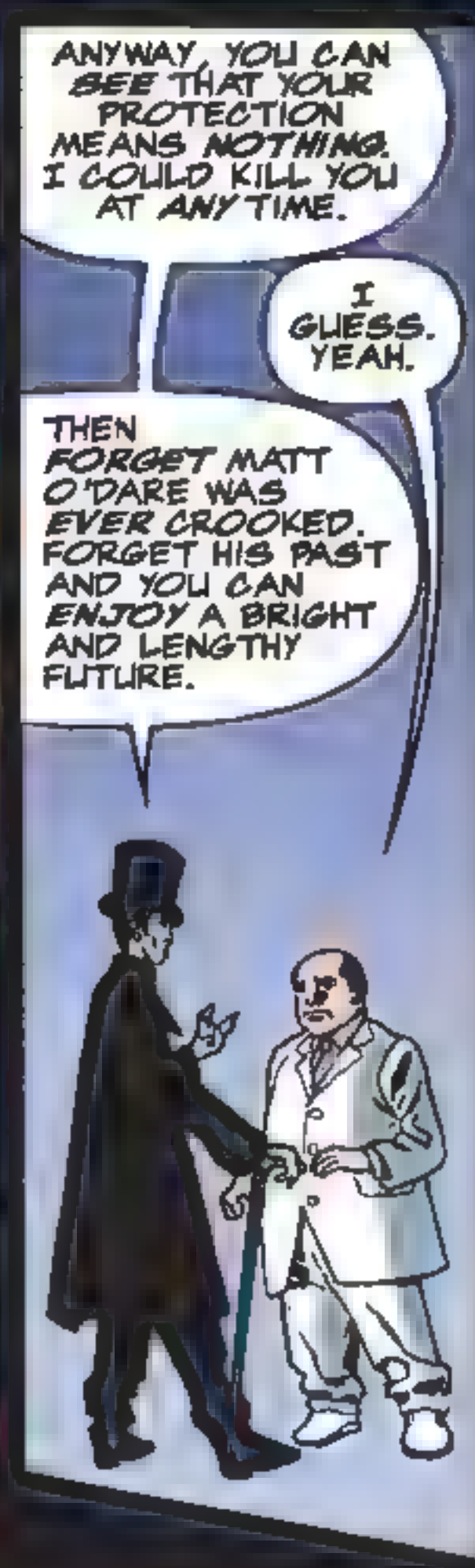
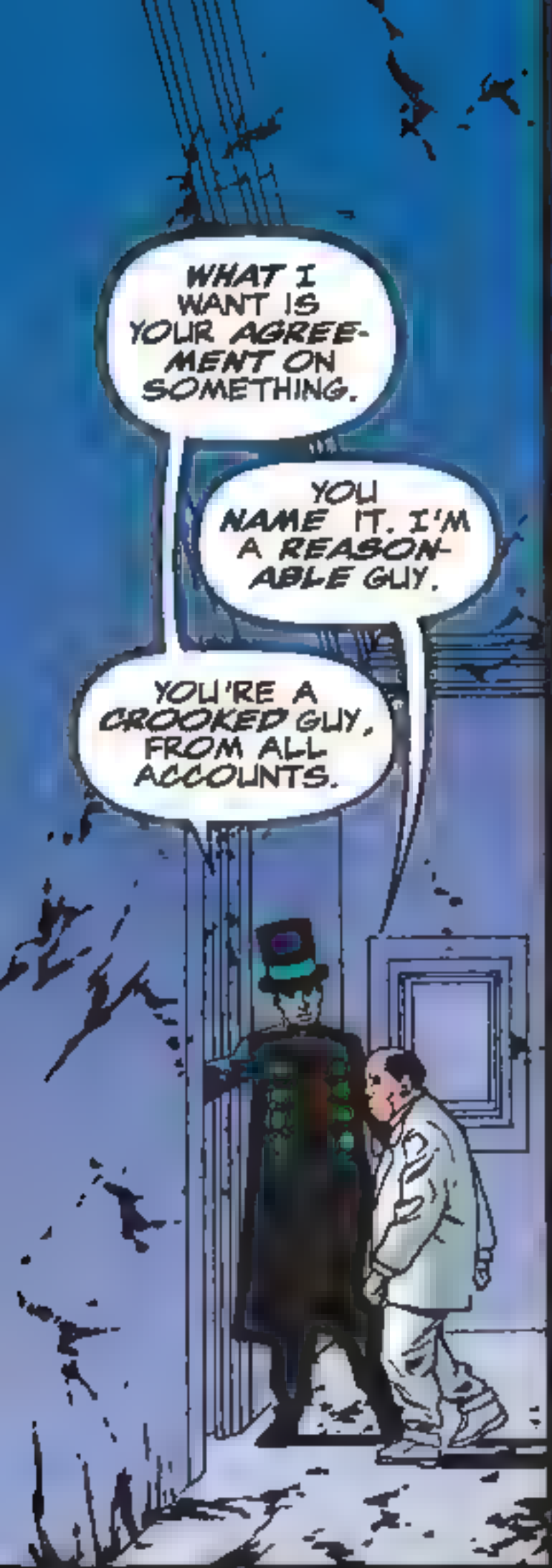
IT CAN BE A TERRIBLE SIGHT, SOMETIMES, DON'T YOU THINK? ...



WHO ARE
YOU? WHAT
DO YOU
WANT?

ANSWER
ONE. I'M
NOT
BOTHERING
TO TELL
YOU.

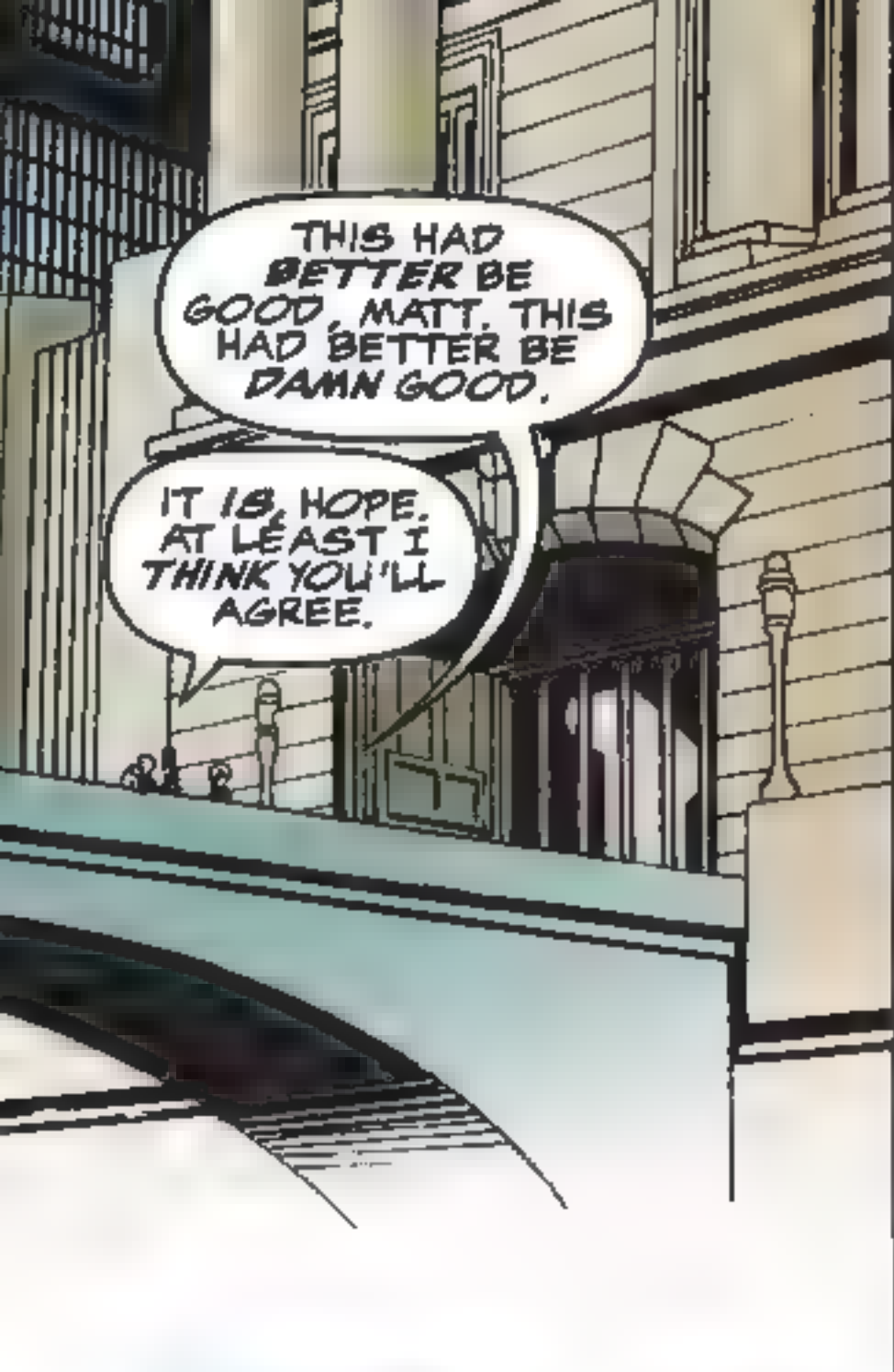
ANSWER
TWO. NOT
A LOT.





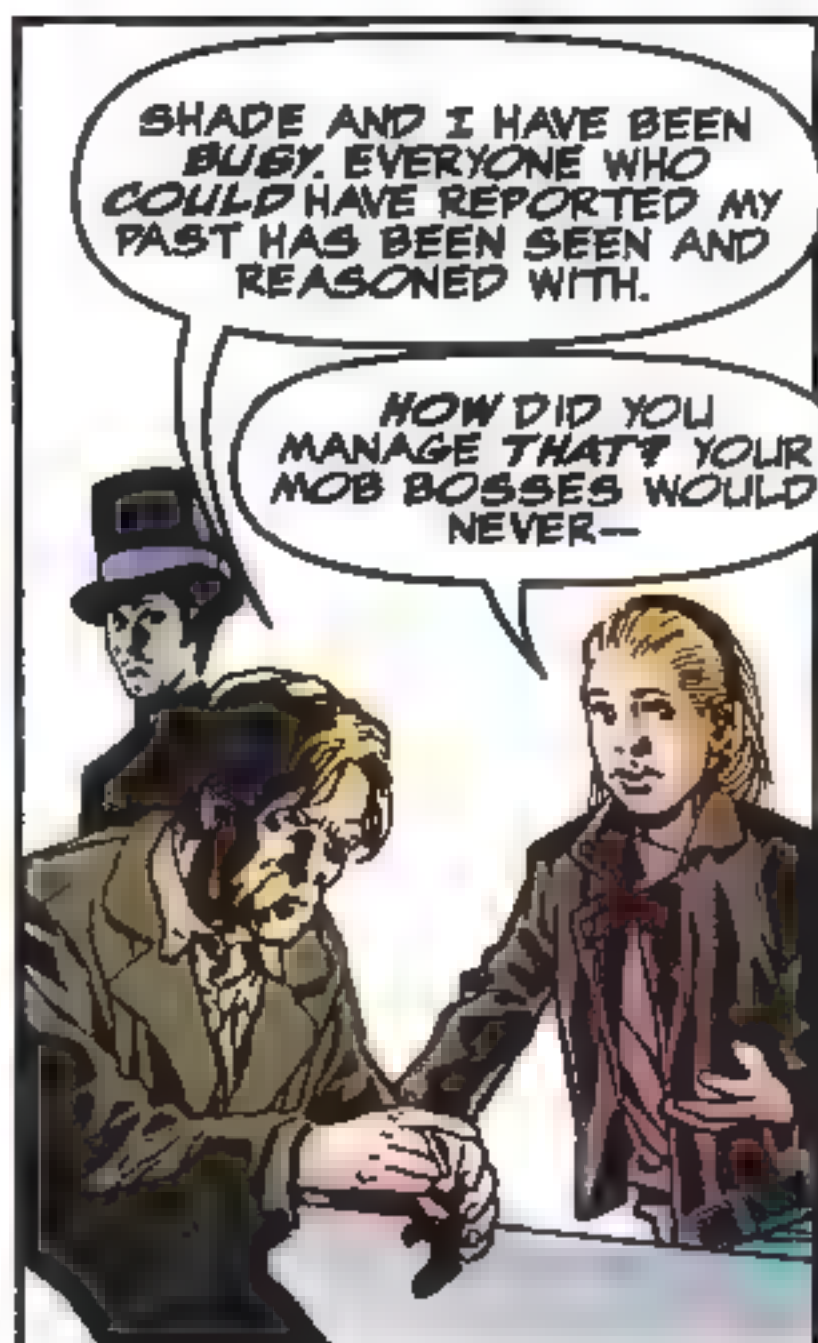
CLEARLY,
YOU ARE NO
GRADUATE OF
THE
STRASBERG
SCHOOL.





THIS HAD BETTER BE GOOD, MATT. THIS HAD BETTER BE DAMN GOOD.

IT IS, HOPE. AT LEAST I THINK YOU'LL AGREE.



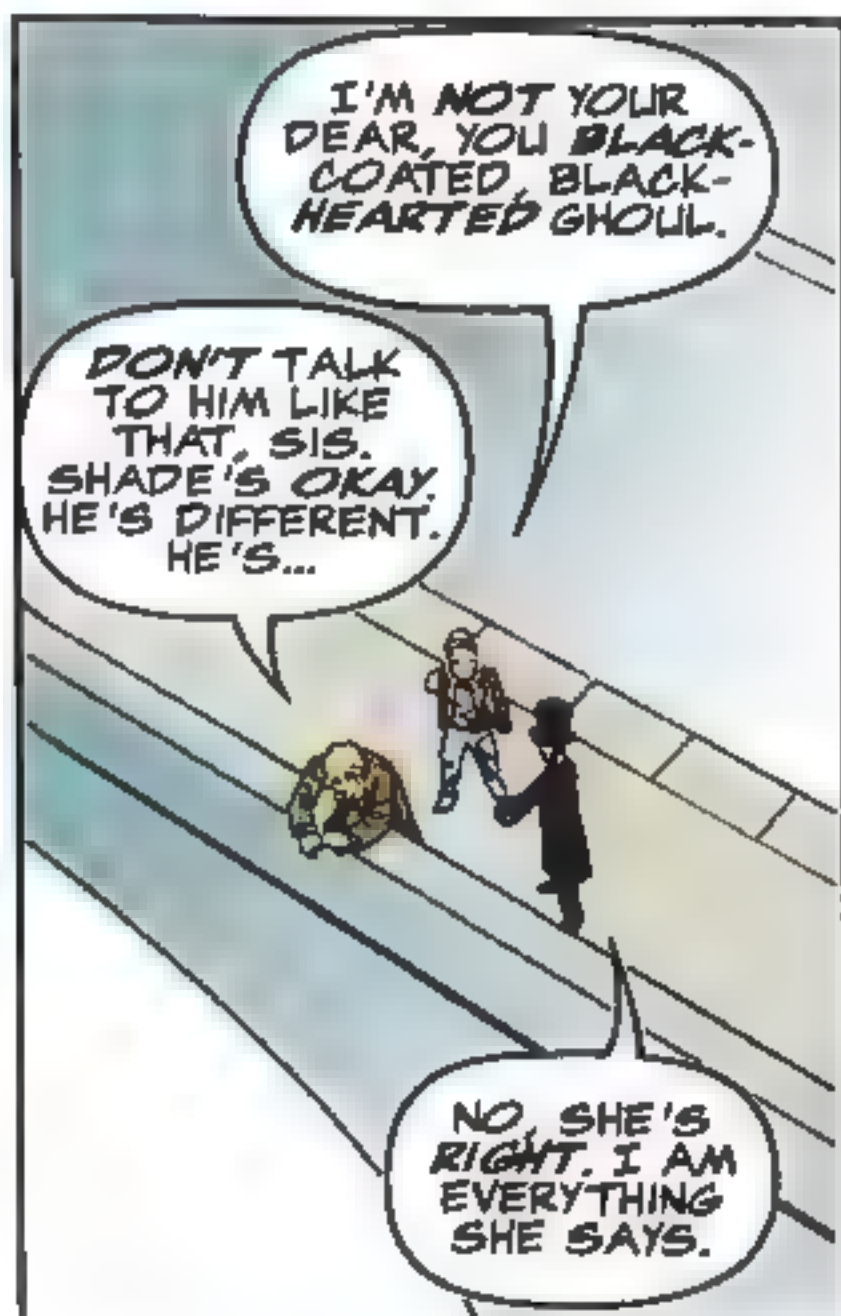
SHADE AND I HAVE BEEN BUSY. EVERYONE WHO COULD HAVE REPORTED MY PAST HAS BEEN SEEN AND REASONED WITH.

HOW DID YOU MANAGE THAT? YOUR MOB BOSSES WOULD NEVER—



OH, SO ALL THESE KILLINGS WERE YOU TWO?

GUILTY AS CHARGED, MY DEAR.



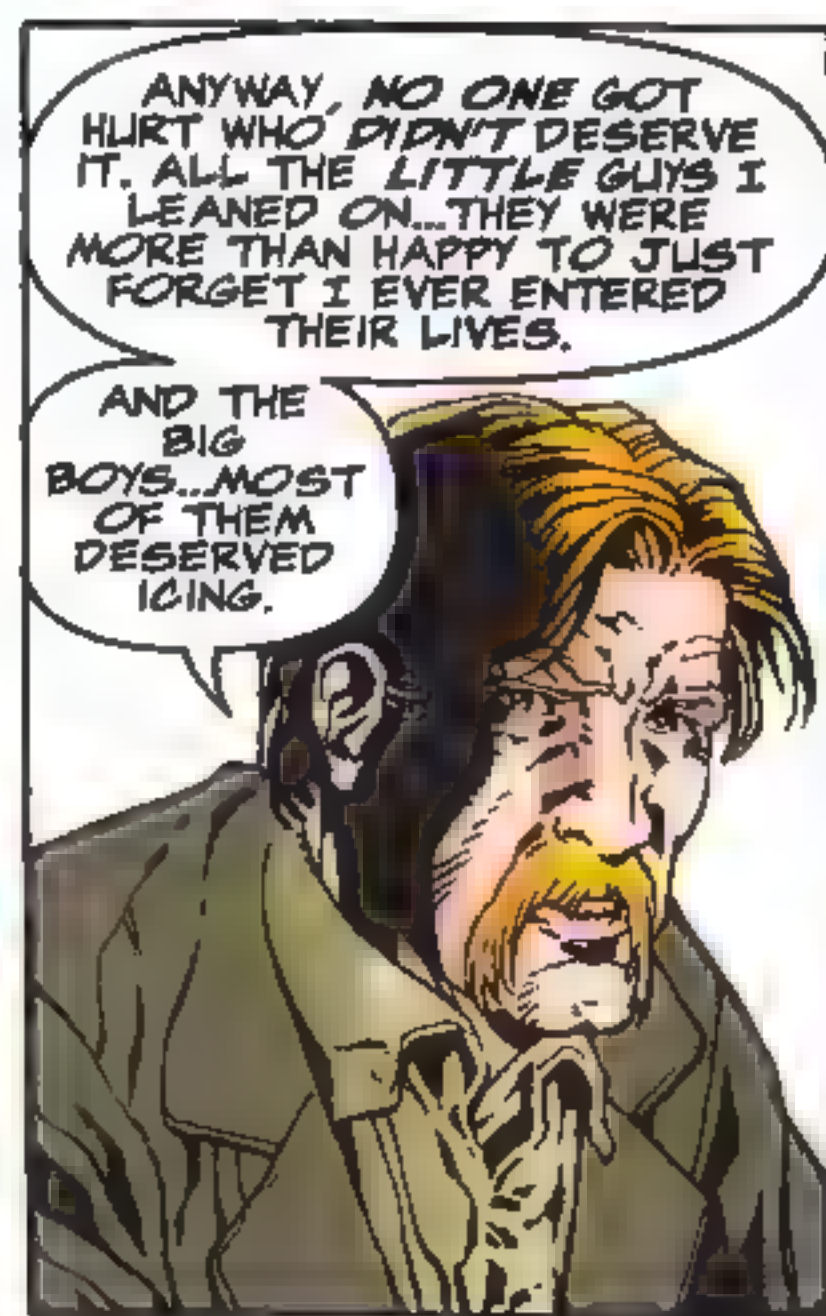
I'M NOT YOUR DEAR, YOU BLACK-COATED, BLACK-HEARTED GHOUL.

DON'T TALK TO HIM LIKE THAT, SIS. SHADE'S OKAY. HE'S DIFFERENT. HE'S...

NO, SHE'S RIGHT. I AM EVERYTHING SHE SAYS.



BUT IT DOESN'T BOTHER ME, HOPE. SO WHY SHOULD IT BOTHER YOU?



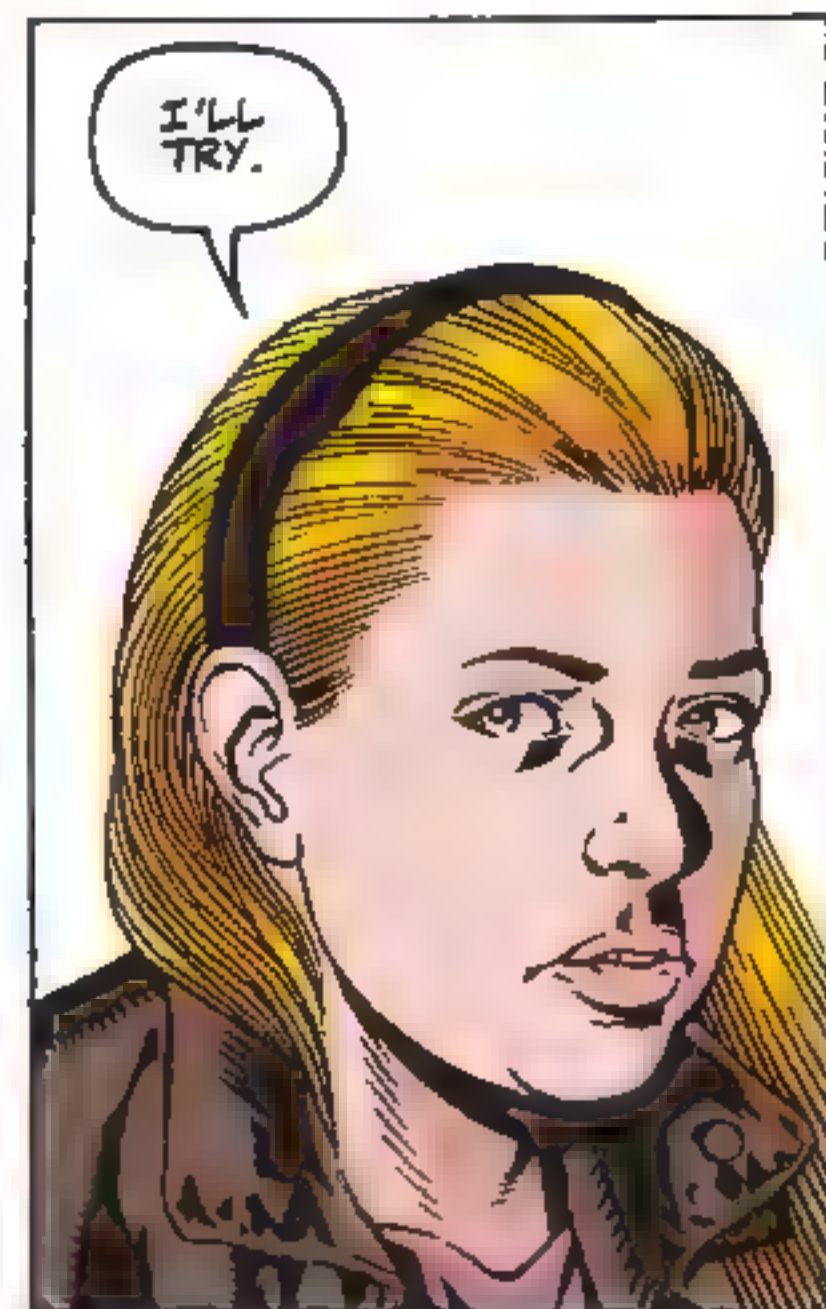
ANYWAY, NO ONE GOT HURT WHO DIDN'T DESERVE IT. ALL THE LITTLE GUYS I LEANED ON... THEY WERE MORE THAN HAPPY TO JUST FORGET I EVER ENTERED THEIR LIVES.

AND THE BIG BOYS... MOST OF THEM DESERVED ICING.

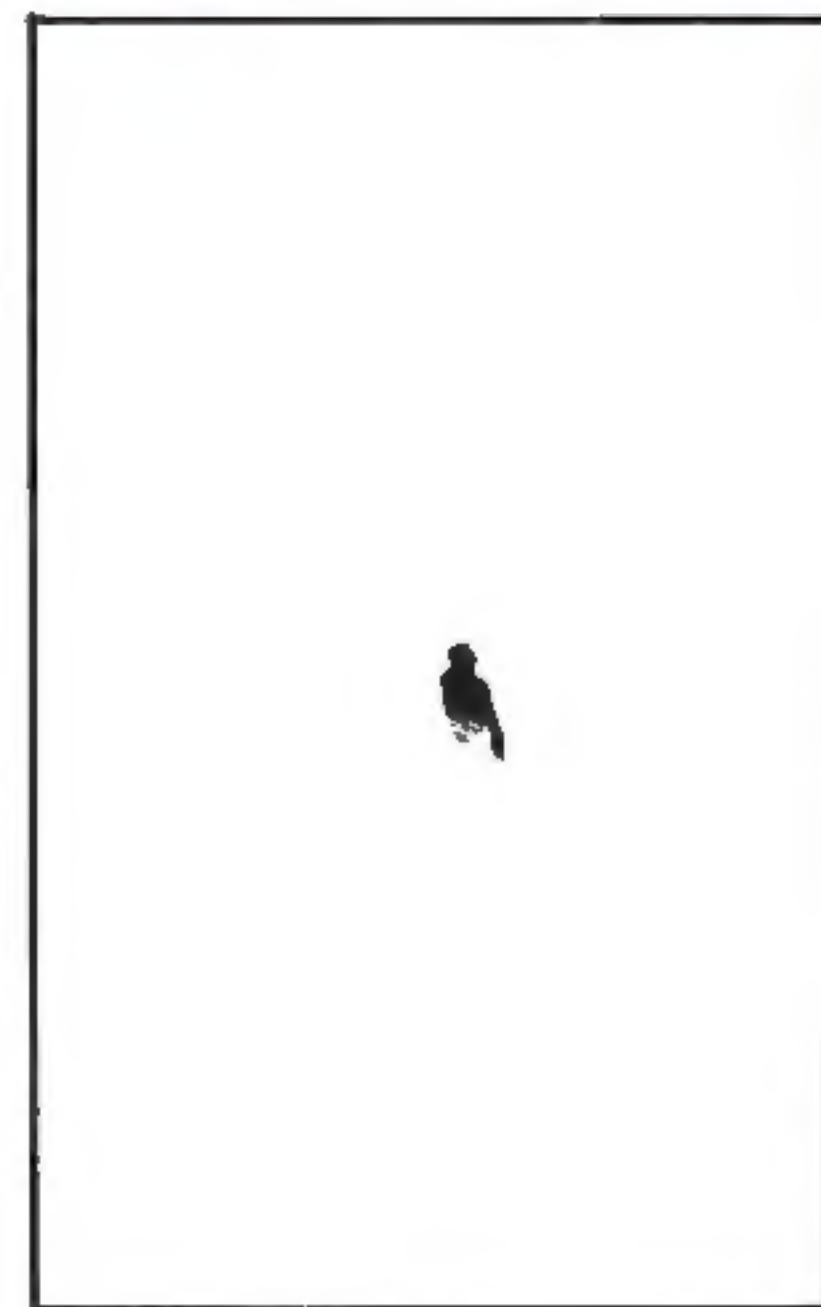
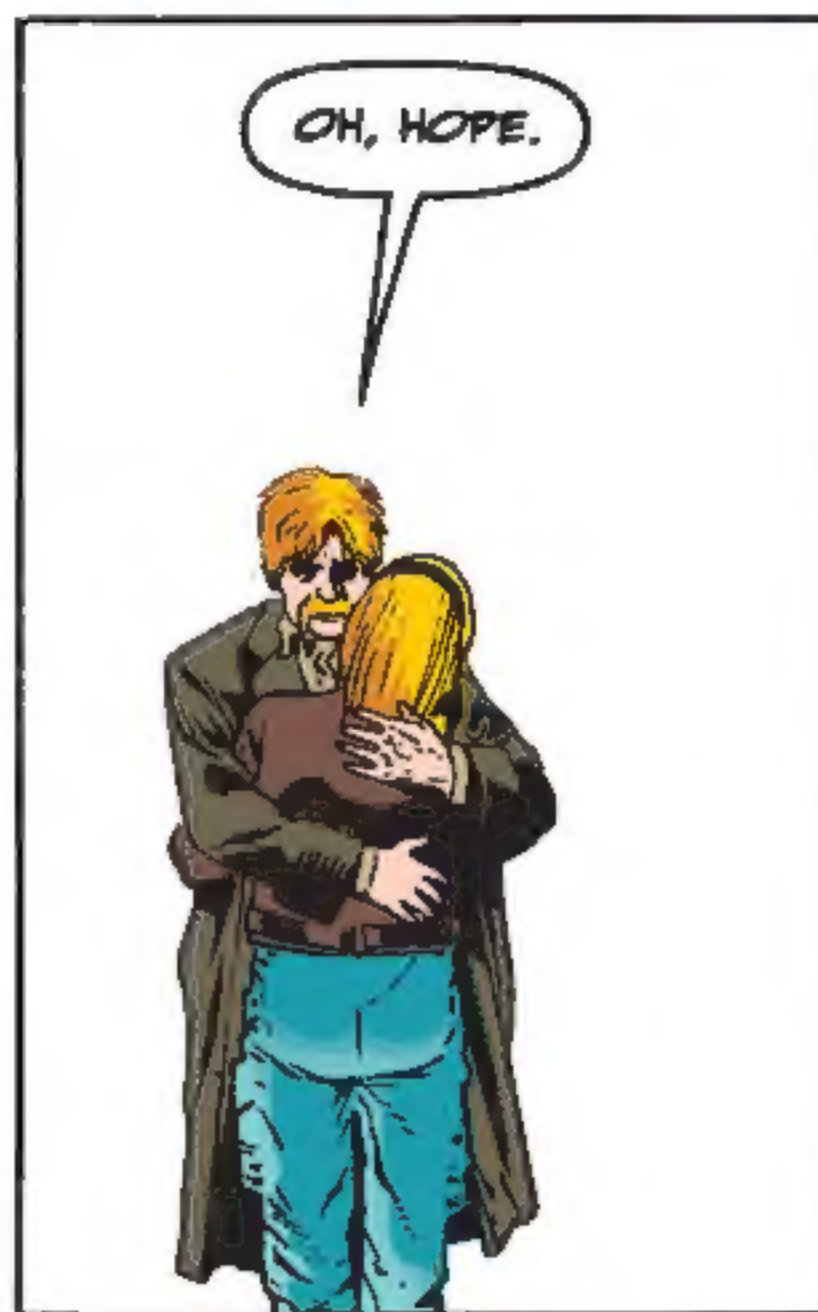
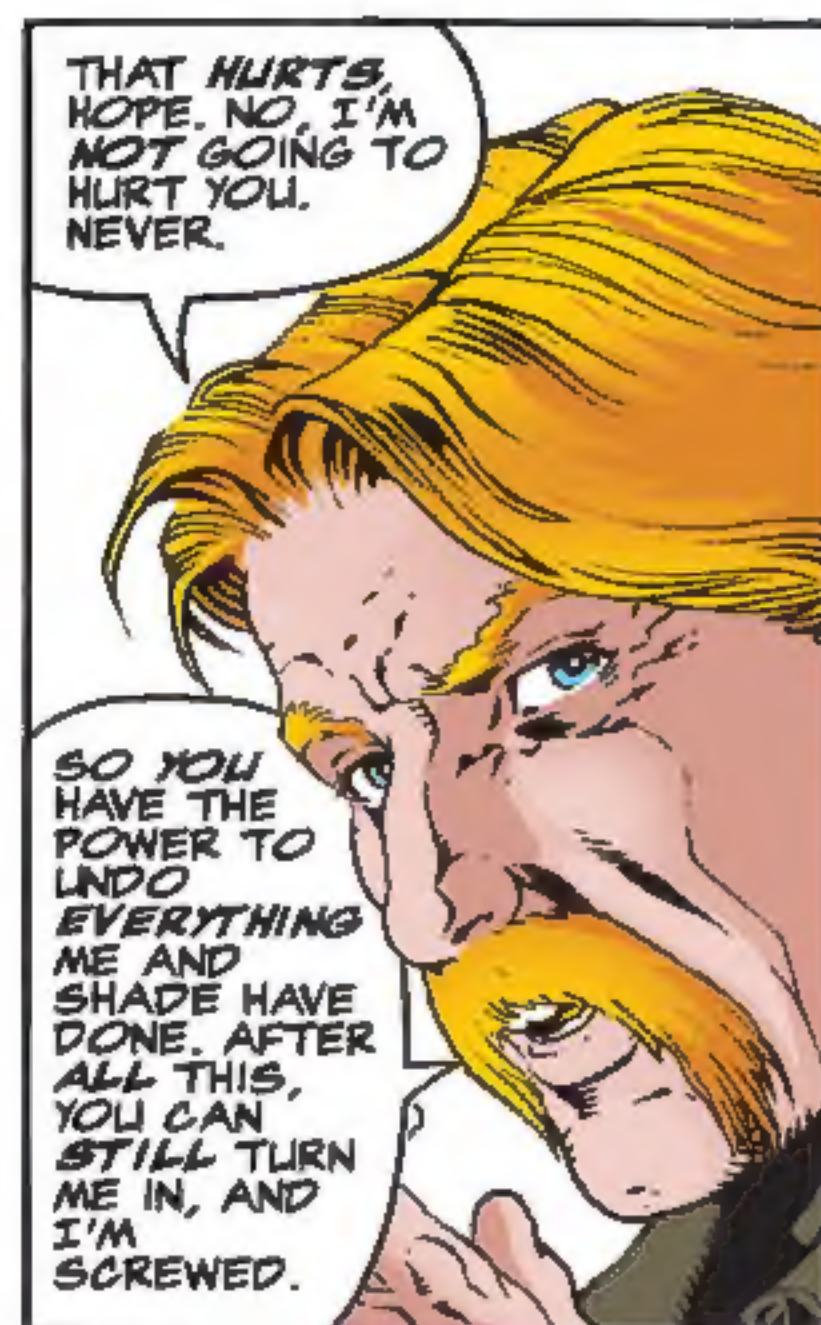
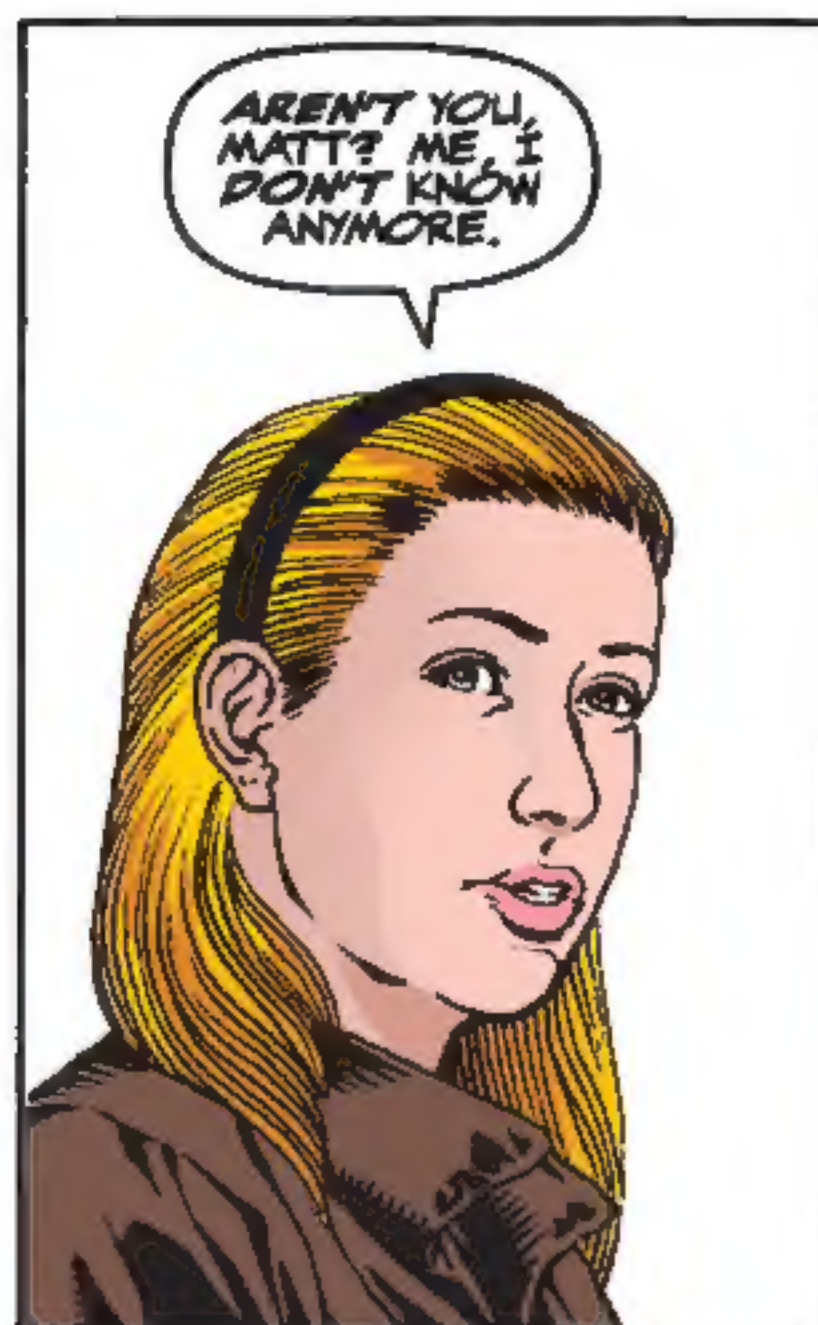


THAT'S NOT FOR YOU TO DECIDE, MATT. YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO BE A GOOD COP, BUT SPEND YOUR TIME PLAYING VIGILANTE.

IT WAS MY LAST LOT OF BAD BEFORE THE GOOD COULD BEGIN, HOPE. YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THAT.



I'LL TRY.





YOU LIKE MY SISTER?

I HAVE LEARNED IT'S NOT WISE FOR ONE SUCH AS ME TO LIKE ANYONE...NOT IN THE WAY YOU'RE IMPLYING.



SO, YOU AND ME? WE'RE NOT FRIENDS? YOU DID ALL THIS OUT OF MEMORY FOR MY PAST INCARNATION?

I THINK THAT'S BEST.

MY BEST FRIEND...



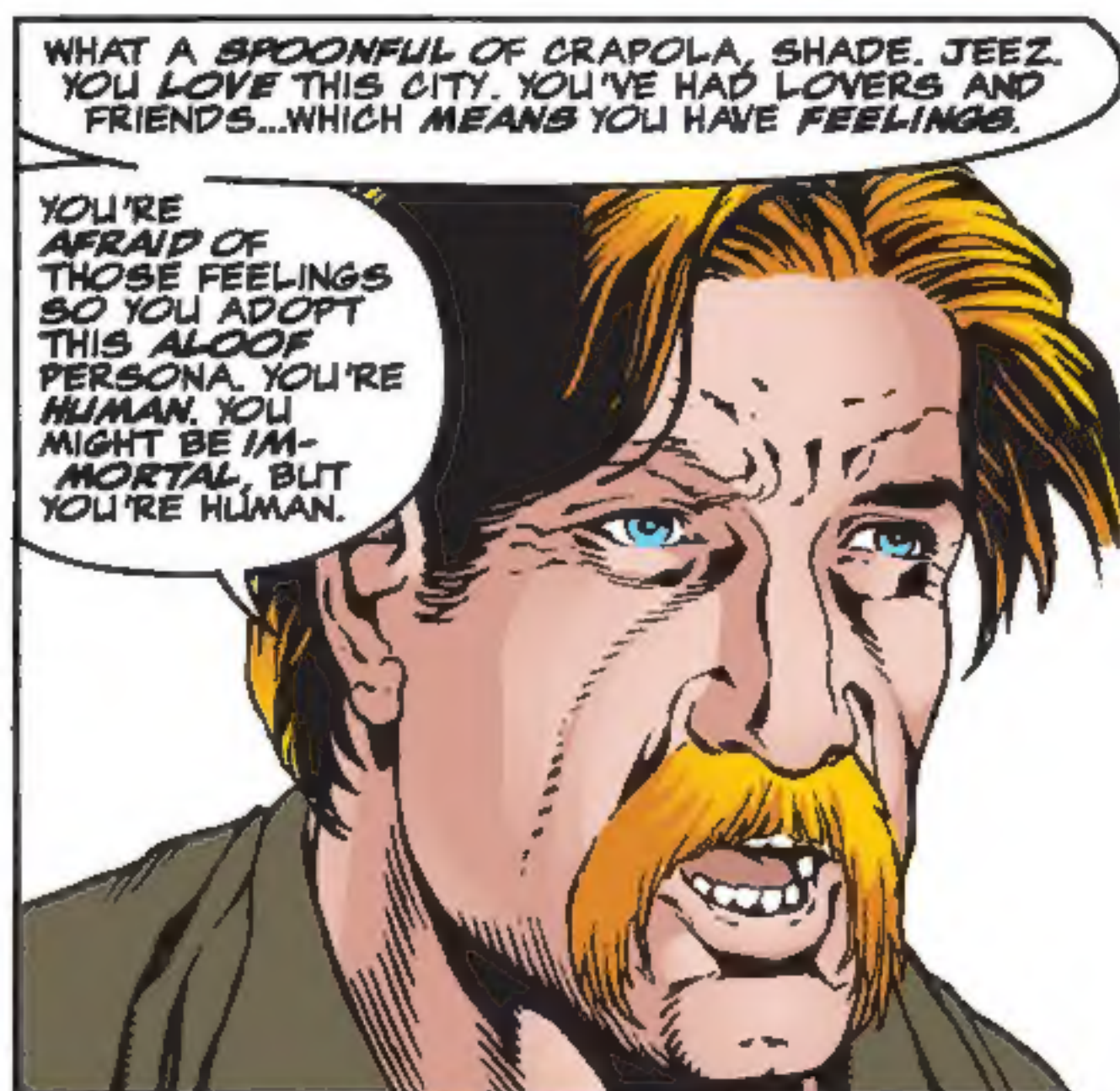
...BRIAN SAVAGE.

...WHEN HE DIED... THAT WAS A TERRIBLE LOSS.



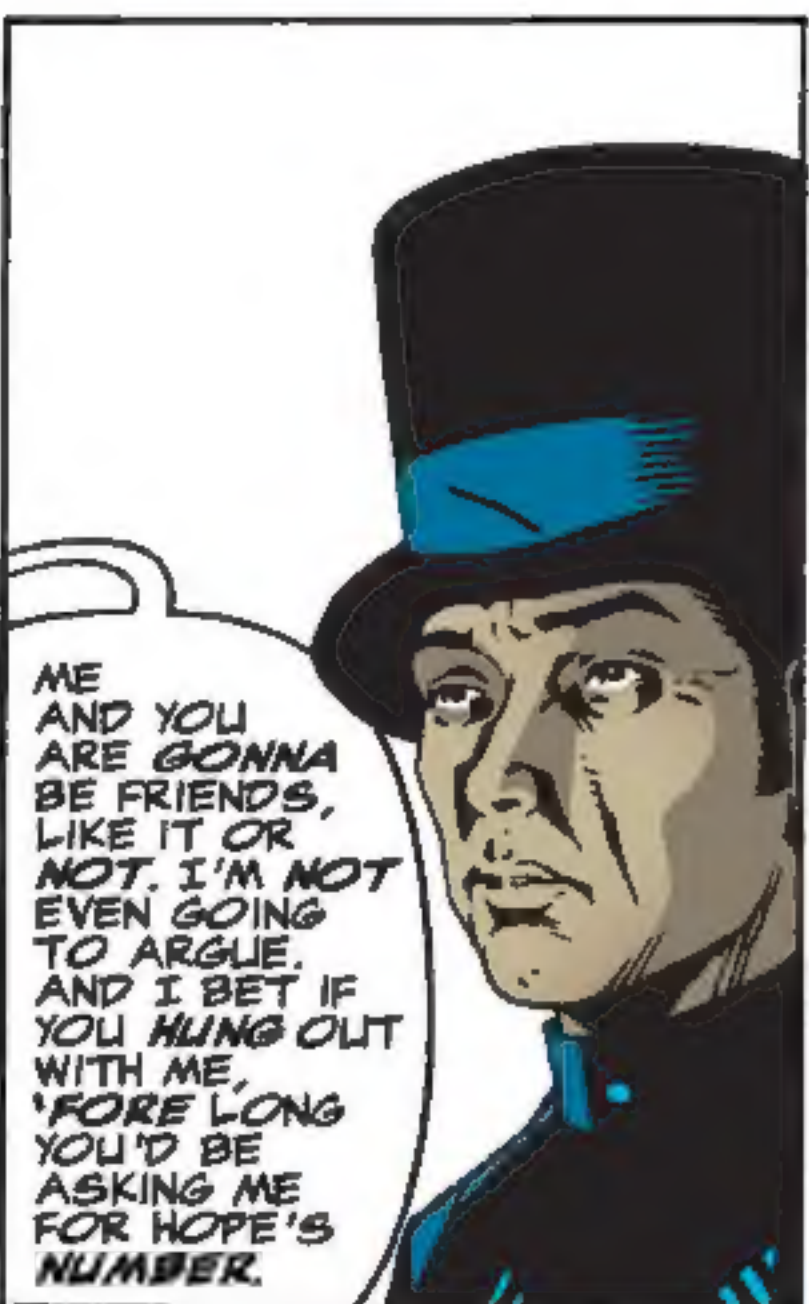
BUT ISN'T THAT LIFE? LOSING PEOPLE WE LOVE. ISN'T THAT WHAT MAKES US HUMAN BEINGS...DEALING WITH THAT?

I AM NOT A HUMAN BEING.



WHAT A SPOONFUL OF CRAPOLA, SHADE. JEEZ. YOU LOVE THIS CITY. YOU'VE HAD LOVERS AND FRIENDS...WHICH MEANS YOU HAVE FEELINGS.

YOU'RE AFRAID OF THOSE FEELINGS SO YOU ADOPT THIS ALOOF PERSONA. YOU'RE HUMAN. YOU MIGHT BE IMMORTAL, BUT YOU'RE HUMAN.

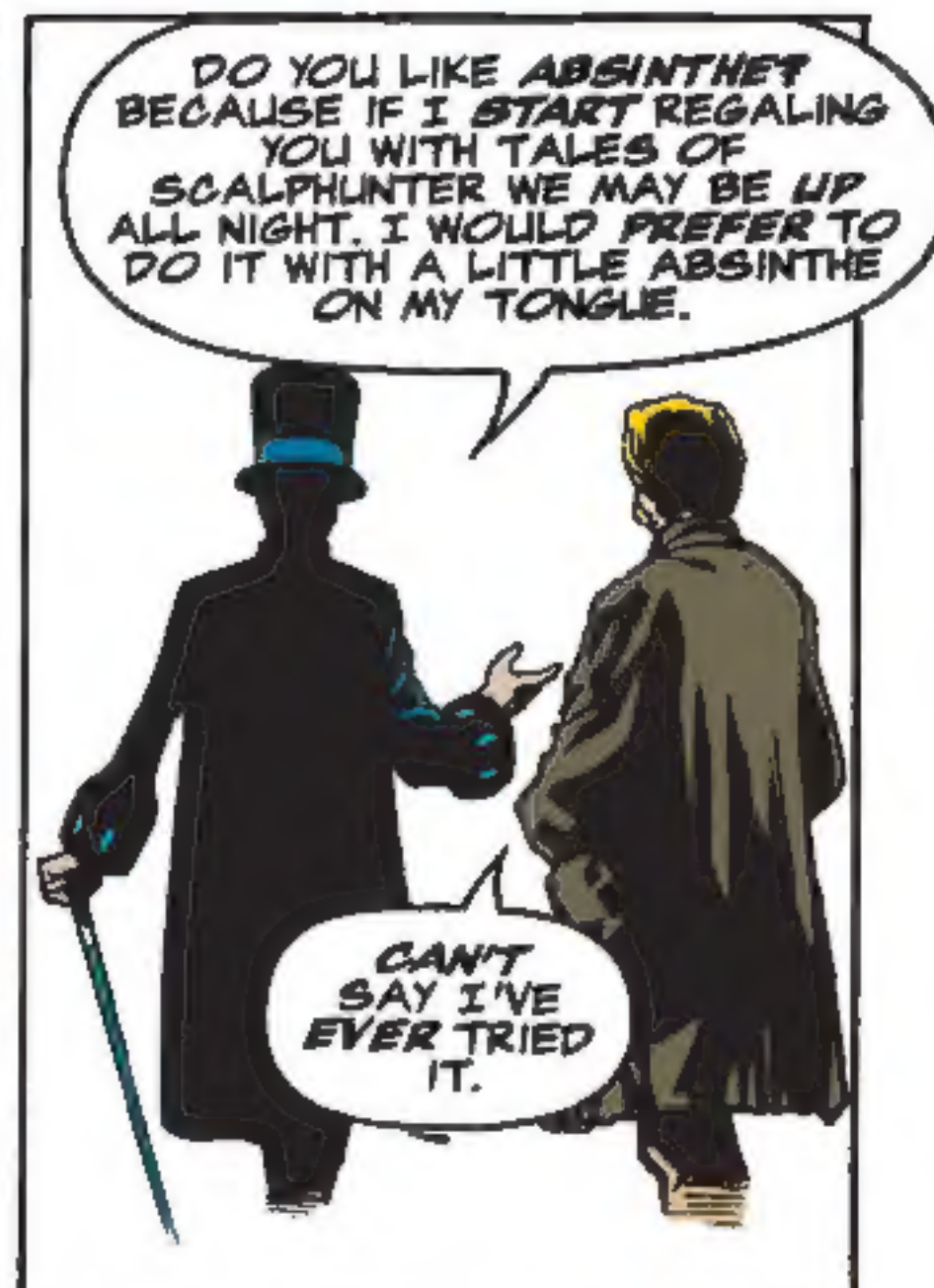


ME AND YOU ARE GONNA BE FRIENDS, LIKE IT OR NOT. I'M NOT EVEN GOING TO ARGUE. AND I BET IF YOU HUNG OUT WITH ME, 'FORE LONG YOU'D BE ASKING ME FOR HOPE'S NUMBER.



IS IT MY ROSE-TINTED MEMORIES OF THAT TIME...OR ARE YOU BECOMING MORE LIKE BRIAN SAVAGE BY THE MINUTE?

WHAT WAS HE LIKE? BRIAN SAVAGE?



DO YOU LIKE ABSINTHE? BECAUSE IF I START REGALING YOU WITH TALES OF SCALPHUNTER WE MAY BE UP ALL NIGHT. I WOULD PREFER TO DO IT WITH A LITTLE ABSINTHE ON MY TONGUE.

CAN'T SAY I'VE EVER TRIED IT.



SO, BRIAN SAVAGE...YOU WERE GOING TO TELL ME ABOUT HIM.

OH, YES. SCALPHUNTER. GOODNESS, THERE IS SO MUCH TO TELL.

WHERE SHALL I BEGIN?...

THE END

Deadman Wade

"THIS IS WHAT
AWESOME
LOOKS LIKE".

DCP